

OCI No. 1810/65

3 June 1965

State Department review completed

MEMORANDUM

Recent Municipal and Provincial Elections
In South Vietnam

1. The elections held on 30 May throughout much of South Vietnam were to establish councils in all provinces, the prefecture of Saigon/Cholon, and the chartered cities of Hué, Da Nang, Dalat, and Vung Tau. The new councils will replace those previously elected or appointed under earlier regimes, and will have somewhat expanded membership: 30 members on the Saigon Council and from 6 to 15 members on the provincial and other municipal councils as determined by population, number of districts, local budgets, and security.

2. No national issues figured directly in the elections, and candidates campaigned purely on local matters. There were approximately 1,000 total candidates for a total of 471 seats. In most areas, this meant at least two contestants per seat, although the US consul in Hué reports that only 17 candidates ran for the 12-member city council, six having withdrawn before the elections in apparent discouragement over their prospects against candidates supported by a powerful Buddhist bloc. Balloting was limited under the decree governing the elections to areas where local authorities could assure adequate security for voters.

3. Preliminary impressions of US Mission provincial reporters and USOM local advisers were that the central and local authorities had done a commendable job in organizing and running the elections. There were no obvious indications of irregularities or voter coercion. Viet Cong activity was at normal levels throughout the day, but only isolated harassment of the polls was reported, including a few precincts in Bac Lieu and Thua Thien; some delay in opening polls was also reported in Ba Xuyen and Dinh Tuong Provinces because of Viet Cong daylight attacks.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

4. According to the US observers, public interest in the elections ranged from enthusiasm in some areas to apathy in others. In general, however, interest was keener in the rural areas than in the cities, where cynicism is long-standing. Voting was open to all Vietnamese citizens, either native-born or naturalized for five years with only a six-month local residence requirement; a preponderance of voters noted by US observers, however, were women and elder men. Servicemen were eligible to vote under special arrangements by their units and local authorities.

5. According to claims of Saigon's Interior Ministry, voter turnout for the elections averaged 72 percent of the electors. This figure, however, is somewhat misleading, in that "electors" included only registered voters, believed to have averaged only about 50 percent of the potential voting population. Thus, in certain provinces such as Binh Duong and Darlac, where the official turnout was reported as 84 percent and 77 percent respectively, it is estimated that only 40 to 44 percent of prospective voters participated. In Saigon, where the eligible voting population is reported as 716,643 and voter registration totaled 574,736, actual voters numbered 406,396, or 57 percent of the potential electorate. In Go Cong Province south of Saigon, where security factors limited voting, only 20 percent of the estimated eligible voting population participated.

6. Although a final assessment of voting results is not yet available, initial embassy conclusions are that candidates who had served previously on provincial councils generally ran successfully, as did favorites of local religious and labor groups. Candidates from locally dominant groups, such as the Buddhists in the Hue area and the Hoa Hao sect in the delta provinces of Vinh Long and Phong Dinh tended to prevail, while in Darlac Province the council will be almost evenly split among Montagnard, Buddhist, and Catholic candidates. Most candidates ran as independents, and were drawn generally from the professions including teaching,

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

the civil service, and business, with few representing farm areas. In some places, however, party activity was noted, particularly by the Dai Viets in the far north, and the VNQDD (Nationalist Party) around Bien Hoa; former members of the Buddhist-oriented National Salvation Councils were candidates in Binh Dinh Province and Hué. The Hué Council, as elected, includes two prominent Buddhist leaders and one former Salvation Council leader; local Catholics and Dai Viets are already tending to denigrate the new council as a result.

7. The newly established municipal and provincial councils will apparently exercise more power than previous councils established by the Diem government. According to the draft decree, they will exercise "rights of decision" on such local matters as budgeting and revenue, management of public property, approval of public works and welfare programs, public contracts, and boundary redistricting. Except for "a number of matters which must be approved by the prime minister or the ministers concerned," council "decisions" must be carried out by local officials. In the implementation of plans and policies, budgeting accounts, and other records, municipal and provincial officials are to be accountable to the councils, which may recommend to the central government that action be taken against deficient administrators. The councils also have some purely advisory functions. They will be required to meet at least once monthly for seven days, and may generally organize their own internal procedures, subject to approval of local officials.

8. Candidates for the elections were required to be Vietnamese citizens at least 25 years old. Only those with criminal records or those engaged in "pro-Communist or pro-neutralist" activities were excluded. Screening of candidates, and preparation of voter registration lists were carried out by local committees, headed by a judge and made up of equal representation of the local administration and the "public" through existing elected officials or prominent notables. No executive officials or

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

military officers were permitted to run as candidates, but elected officials or servicemen in general could run. The elections were financed by local budgets, which allotted campaign expenses of \$100-400 per candidate. Voting was at large in the provinces and all cities except Saigon, where there were electoral districts; each voter chose an allotted number of councilmen rather than a single representative. The council terms will be three years, but one third will stand for reelection yearly; these thirds will be initially determined by drawing lots.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

STAT

Approved For Release 2004/11/03 : CIA-RDP79T00472A000700040004-4

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/11/03 : CIA-RDP79T00472A000700040004-4